

June 29, 1970

Thomas G. Bowery, Ph.D., Director
Division of Research Resources
Department of Health, Education and Welfare
Public Health Service
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, Maryland 20014

Dear Dr. Bowery:

Your letter dated June 15, 1970, indicated that a private citizen had expressed concern in a letter to President Nixon, that computer systems at Stanford University are being used inappropriately to further the efforts of groups opposed to U.S. involvement in the Indochina War.

Your communicant apparently was also under the mistaken impression that a large part of the ACME system's capacity had been diverted to inappropriate partisan activities.

The first week of May was, we must regretfully recall, a time when life throughout the country, and on the campuses in particular, was stressed by enormous pressures and violent emotions to a degree that would not long be compatible with the viability of a democratic society. I do not doubt that there were some lapses of judgment during that period. Even the idea that a computer-composed letter could be a useful way of influencing a legislator speaks to some lack of realism.

The development of an alert interest by many students in more effective political activity within our constitutional system is one of the more encouraging events of the succeeding weeks. It is perfectly obvious, nevertheless, that we have certain responsibilities in the administration of a government-funded resource and that partisan political activity with such a resource would be an abuse of the trust placed in us.

We have advised our users and operators about this policy and the need to avoid any public misunderstanding about possible discrepancies from it. We do not believe that more than a trivial percentage of the computer's capability could have been diverted in this way at any time despite a volume of output that might be misleadingly impressive to a lay onlooker.

The time sharing environment for the ACME computer does make it as difficult to police every activity undertaken thereon as it would be to monitor telephone calls. Indeed it would require an inordinate intrusion in terms of cost and

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invasion of privacy to attempt ultimate policing. This applies particularly to the small proportion of computer time that has been made available to general student educational use.

To recapitulate the specific steps that are and will be taken to minimize such abuses: 1. All users will again be advised about our policy and 2. Specific abuses that come to our attention will be attended to and mitigated as expeditiously as possible.

In the present climate I believe we can count on the general cooperation of our user community to be, by far, the most effective way of dealing with this problem.

If your correspondent, or any other source, can advise me of any specific discrepancies at any time in the future, I will respond appropriately to such information.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/ged

cc: R. Jamtgaard
W. Miller

P.S. Provost Lyman has also just circulated these guidelines which pertain to the problem. *(memo of 6/19/70)*